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ABSTRACT

This document presents some understandings of the total labor force and the total job market and suggests some basic interpretations of their meaning. It provides five clarifying statements regarding expected changes in the workforce between 1986 and 2000: (1) growth in the labor force does not necessarily mean growth in jobs; (2) it is unlikely that the new workers will get the new jobs; (3) replacement jobs in low paying occupations are likely for many new workforce members; (4) the total occupational society is not changing quickly; and (5) the changing workforce and the changing occupational structure are on a collision course. The seriousness of the problem from the standpoint of the changing workforce is then illustrated. A section on women discusses the changing characteristics of women workers, notes that most women continue in traditionally female occupations, explains how the earnings gap differences between women and men may be due to more than sex discrimination, and considers how the two-worker family requires changes in the home/family structure. A section on minorities notes that minority persons are disadvantaged both in educational settings and in the workforce. Other sections examine poverty and immigrants in the workforce. It is emphasized that the basic challenges in meeting the needs of the changing workforce in the years 1986-2000 include problems of discrimination, poverty, and educational preparation. It is concluded that priority must be given to providing equality in access to both educational and occupational opportunities. (NB)

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THE CHANGING FACE OF THE WORKFORCE: 1986 - 2000 - SETTING THINGS STRAIGHT

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Introduction

Studying current and projected labor force statistics can easily lead to frustration and confusion. Figures taken for different time periods, for different age groupings, and for differing sub-populations often lead to quite opposite conclusions. To put any given set of specific data into proper perspective demands at least a rudimentary understanding of the total labor force and the total job market. Only then can meaningful interpretations of more specific data be made. The goal of this presentation is to present some of these needed understandings along with some basic interpretations of their meaning. I have recently prepared another paper that concentrates primarily on reporting specific data (Hoyt, 1989). This paper is intended to provide only a few examples of these data while concentrating primarily on their implications.

I will begin by providing five clarifying statements regarding expected changes in the workforce between 1986 and 2000. Following this, I will attempt to provide additional data and implications for various parts of the workforce - including (a) women; (b) minorities; (c) poor persons; and (d) immigrants.

Clarifying Statements: The Changing Workforce - 1986 - 2000

1. Growth in the labor force doesn't necessarily mean growth in jobs. The fact that America's labor force is expected to increase by 21 million persons between 1986 and 2000 is no guarantee that 21 million new jobs will be created. The term "labor force" includes two kinds of people: (a) those who are working; and (b) those looking for work. Because of population demographics and demonstrated trends, it's fairly safe to predict there will be 21 million more members of the labor force. What we obviously don't know is the unemployment rates that will exist during the 1986 - 2000 period. We can say 21 million new labor force entrants means 21 million more jobs only if we assume the unemployment rate will stay as it is now for the entire 1986 - 2000 period. The number of new jobs could be either more or less.

2. It's unlikely that the new workers will get the new jobs. The new jobs expected to be created will, on the average, require more education and greater skills than today's jobs (Silvestri & Lukasiewicz, 1987). Five out of every six expected new job entrants during the 1986 - 2000 period will be women, minorities, and/or immigrants (Johnston & Packer, 1987; Kutscher, 1987a) - persons who, on the average, are less well prepared for occupational success than are non-minority white males (Astin, 1982; Earhart & Sandler, 1987; Garrett Park Press, 1987; Time for Results, 1986; Wetzel, 1987). Furthermore, there is good evidence to indicate that, in today's workforce, women, minorities, and immigrants aren't, by and large, in those occupational areas where the greatest numbers of new jobs are now being created. Instead, they are, as groups, overrepresented in those occupations growing most slowly and underrepresented in those occupations growing most rapidly (Earhart & Sandler, 1987; Johnston & Packer, 1987; National Alliance

of Business, 1986). Since somewhere between two-thirds (Women and Work, November, 1988) and three-fourths (National Alliance of Business, 1987) of all workers who will be working in the year 2000 are in the workforce today - and since business/industry is currently spending $30 - $50 billion dollars per year formally training workers and another $180 billion per year in informal training (Research & Planning Committee, CED, 1987), it seems highly likely that most of the good new jobs will go to currently employed workers, not to the women, minority persons, and immigrants who will comprise five out of every six new job entrants.

3. Replacement jobs in low paying occupations are likely for many new workforce members. Rosenthal (1988) estimates that the number of replacement jobs during the 1986 - 2000 period will be at least double the number of new jobs. If educational patterns now existing for women, minorit, persons, and immigrants continue, it is obvious that many will be prepared only for relatively unskilled work in low paying occupations. Seven of the ten occupations expected to provide the most jobs by 1995 are in this category (Smith, Walker, & Baker, 1987). They include janitors, cleaners, waiters-/waitresses, and nursing aides/orderlies. It is not a very optimistic picture to paint. However, if things stay as they are today, it is a realistic one.

4. The total occupational society isn't changing fast. The expected 21 million new workforce members during the 1986 - 2000 period will increase the workforce from 111.6 million to 133.0 million (Silvestri & Lukasiewicz, 1987) - a 19% increase. The rate of job growth 1986 - 2000 will be only about half as great as it was during the 1972 - 1986 period (Kutscher, 1987a). This means it requires a very great increase in a particular sub-category to make any significant impact on the total labor force.

Confusion and misunderstandings can easily occur when statistics associated with only expected new workforce members are studied without considering the big picture of the total workforce. For example, consider the following figures taken from an article by Kutscher (1987):

Projected increase in blacks in the labor force - 1986-2000 - - - 29%
Projected increase in Hispanics in the labor force 1986 - 2000 - 74%

Contrast these with another set of figures supplied by Fullerton (1987).

- - % of blacks in total work force - - 1986 - 11% - - 2000 - 12%
- - % of Hispanics in total work force - 1986 - 7% - - -2000 - 10%

Both articles appear in the same issue of Monthly Labor Review and both Kutscher and Fullerton are professionals employed in the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Further, both sets of figures are correct. To understand how this can be possible, it is necessary to recognize that Kutscher's percentages represent the percent increase of black workers in the year 2000 when the number of black workers in 1986 is used as the base. Fullerton's base is the number of black workers divided by the total number of workers.

Similar confusion can easily result if we contrast the prediction that 37.8% of the projected 21 million new jobs will require some form of postsecondary education (Silvestri & Lucasiewicz, 1987) with another set of statistics indicating that the percentage of jobs in the total workforce requiring some form of postsecondary education will grow from 25.0% in 1986 to 27.0% in

2000 - only a two percent increase. This, of course, is the difference in calculating percentages based on new jobs with percentages based on the total number of jobs in the workforce. While the percentage requiring less than a high school diploma will decline from 34.0% to 33.0% between 1986 and 2000, it is obvious that, even by the year 2000, more jobs will require less than a high school education than will require any form of postsecondary education. Those who today are proclaiming youth who fail to pursue post-secondary education will be doomed to failure in tomorrow's workforce are clearly wrong. It is the trends, not the current facts, that lead us to encourage today's youth to consider postsecondary education. By the time they end their working lives, it may very well be required - but that isn't the case today.

5. The changing workforce and the changing occupational structure are on a collison course. The trends toward demanding a better educated, more skilled workforce exist for as long as we can see into the future. Even where job titles remain the same, the skills required for successful job performance are being modified by technological change (Mark, 1987). Similarly, it is now clear that the trend toward creating a workforce composed 50% by women and 50% by men will continue indefinitely. Birth rate figures make it equally clear that current trends for more minority persons to be workforce members will increase, not decrease, in the years ahead (Hodgkinson, 1985). The rate of immigration shows no signs of slowing (McCarty & Carrera, 1988). Poverty in the United States appears to be increasing, not decreasing (Edelman,1988). It is these trends that make the primary case for need to improve educational and occupational opportunities available to women, minorities, poor persons, and immigrants. If nothing is done, the situation will become worse with each passing year and, early in the 21st century, will become a societal disaster.

The remainder of this presentation is devoted to illustrating the seriousness of the problem from the standpoint of the changing workforce. It is assumed that the topic of the changing workplace has already been studied.

Women In The Changing Workforce: 1986 - 2000

Kutscher (1987a) has produced statistics indicating that: (a) two-thirds of new entrants into the labor force between 1986 and 2000 will be women; (b) this has been true each year for the last 17 years; and (c) by the Year 2000, women will comprise 47% of the labor force - up from 45% in 1986 and from 39% in 1972. These kinds of statistics can also be misleading. Here, four perspectives on the topic of women in the workforce will be presented.

1. The characteristics of women workers are changing. The percentage of women ages 25 - 54 stood at 70.8% in 1986 and is projected to reach 80.8% by 2000 when four out of every five women in this age range are expected to be in the workforce (Fullerton, 1987). In 1957, only 30% of women in this age category were employed (Herz, September, 1988). The number of older women in the workforce is also increasing with 6.2 million 55 and older constituting about 4 out of every 10 workers in this age category. Thus, to emphasize the fact that the "two-thirds of new labor market entrants" remains relatively constant is to miss the point. It isn't primarily young women hoping to soon be married and leave the labor force permanently that are involved today.

2. Most women continue to be employed in traditionally female occupations. True, notable progress has been made in the numbers and percentages of women entering into such occupations as physician, lawyer, business executive, and engineering - i.e., into relatively high paying professional occupations. When lower skilled occupations employing the most workers are considered, this kind of progress in reducing occupational sex stereotyping cannot be readily observed. For example, a recent Bureau of Labor Statistics report entitled "Employment of Women in Nontraditional Jobs, 1983 - 88" (1988) reports that, in 1988: (a) women accounted for only two percent of skilled construction workers and four percent of mechanics and repairers, but (b) 93% of all dressmakers, 90% of sewing-machine operators, and 70% of laundry workers. Sex role stereotyping is alive and well in America's workforce.

3. The earnings gap differences between women and men may be due to more than sex discrimination. Otten (1988) has concluded that, in order to have or to care for children, many women appear willing to accept lower wages in exchange for part-time or more flexible hours, a job location near home, and limits on out-of-town travel. This may well be true. Even if it is, it cannot serve as justification for continuing sex discrimination practices. It is obviously important to protect the right of all persons - including women - to make occupational choices based in part on lifestyle preferences. It is equally important to maximize the number and variety of alternatives available to them.

4. The growing presence of the two-worker family calls for marked changes in the home/family structure. During the third quarter of 1988 alone, there was an increase of 700,000 families where both husband and wife were working (Women and Work, November 21, 1988). Otten (1988) quotes a new book by Victor Fuchs claiming that, between 1980 and 1986, women increased their average hours worked (including paid work, household work, etc.) by 7% while men, on the average, decreased the number of hours they worked - also by 7%. If these figures are valid, they pose very serious problems indeed. Certainly, they cannot be explained by claiming they occured only because women didn't work hard enough in the past!

Minorities in the Workforce: 1986 - 2000

In their new book One-Third Of A Nation, The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life (1988) has presented some startling statistics that demand attention. These include:

a. Today, 14% of all adults - and 20% of all children under Age 17 - are minority persons. By the year 2000, one-third of all America's school-age children will be minority persons.
b. In 25 of our largest cities, half or more of public school students are minority persons in the 1988-89 school year.

1. Minority persons are educationally disadvantaged in both K-12 systems and in higher education. Massive sets of data exist supporting this statement. To illustrate this quickly, only one example from each of several reports will be presented. These include:

a. 40% of today's minority youth are functionally illiterate (Time for Results, 1986).
b. Between 1975 and 1985, the number of blacks earning master's degrees declined by 32% and the number of black men earning doctorates declined by 27%. (Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, 1988).
c. Blacks and Hispanics are grossly underrepresented among advanced degree holders in mathematics, biology, physical science, and engineering (Wilson and Justiz, 1987/1988).
d. Black high school graduates, on the average, attain literacy levels only slightly above those of white eighth-graders and white high school graduates perform nearly as well, on the average, as black graduates of four year colleges (Ralph, 1989).
e. Academic failure rates continue to be considerably higher for minority students than for whites (Carnegie Foundation, 1988).

2. Minority persons are disadvantaged in America's workforce. Again, a very great deal of literatre exists validating this assertion. The following examples are only illustrative:
a. The 1988 unemployment rate among white college graduates was 1.5% while, for black college graduates, it was 3.3% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 29, 1988).
b. The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life (1988) reported that, in 1988, the unemployment rate for blacks was 12.2%, for Hispanics, 9.3%, but for whites only 4.6%.
c. Unemployment rates for black youth are almost twice as high as for non-minority white youth (Smith, Walker, & Baker, 1987).
d. In 1987, the unemployment rate among non-Hispanic white high school dropouts was 20.7% while, for black high school graduates, it was 27.0% (Wetzel, 1987).

Earlier, I attempted to provide data illustrating that sex discrimination in America's workforce is still very evident and very serious. After reviewing the data on race discimination in the workforce, I must conclude that racism appears to be an even greater problem at the present time than is sexism. This is not to downplay the importance of continuing efforts aimed at erradicating sexism. Rather, it is only an attempt to emphasize reality.

Poverty in the Workforce: 1986 - 2000

Poverty is a prime culprit behind the problems of many who will seek to enter the labor market during the 1986 - 2000 period. The presence of poverty in America can be quickly illustrated with the following data:
1. The Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life (1988) reports that, in 1986, 13.6% of Americans were poor - up from 11.4% in 1978.
2. In 1985, three-fourths of families maintained by women under 25 years old were living in poverty (Wetzel, 1987).
3. In 1986, more than 12 million American children lived in families with incomes below the poverty level - up from 10 million in 1972 (Edelman, Fall, 1987/Winter, 1988).
4. Poor young women, regardless of race, are 3 - 4 times more likely to become unwed mothers than are more affluent teens (Wetzel, 1987).

While two-thirds of all poor children are white, the odds of living in poverty are three times greater for blacks than for whites (Research & Policy Committee, CED, 1987a). Of 18 year olds expected to live in the year 2000 who are both black and born into a female-headed household, two in three will live in poverty (Edelman, Fall, 1987/Winter, 1988). Hispanic poverty rates are now comparable to those of blacks and are expected to exceed blacks by 1990 (Miller et al, 1988). It is clear that the disadvantages of being poor are even greater if, in addition, one is also a minority person.

Poor persons, like minority persons, suffer disadvantages both in terms of educational and occupational opportunities. Examples of illustrative statistics here include:

1. Nearly one-half of all poor youth have below average basic academic skills (Edelman, Fall, 1987/Winter, 1988).
2. Youth from poverty backgrounds are three times more likely than non-poverty youth to be school dropouts (Research & Policy Committee, CED, 1987).
3. Poor youth are more likely to have learning disabilities and to fall behind in school than are non-poverty youth (Wetzel, 1987)
4. Youths from poverty backgrounds are less likely to be in the labor force and, when they are, they are more likely to be unemployed and to have lower earnings than non-poverty youth (Wetzel, 1987).

Unless massive changes take place both within the education system and the labor market, the problems of poor persons in general - and poor minority persons in particular - seem likely to continue and to grow. What Smith, Walker, and Baker (1987) call the "inactivity rate" - defined as "not in school, not employed, not in the military service, not looking for work" -is already a form of social dynamite. Smith et al report that the "inactivity rate" for non-white male 18 - 24 year olds is 27% and, for non-white females, it is 45.6%. This is unacceptably high.

Immigrants in the Workforce: 1986 - 2000

The decade of the 1980s will see an estimated 8.6 million immigrants enter the United States - up 4.3 million in the 1970s and higher than for any other decade in the 20th century except for the 1901 - 1910 period (Kellog, 1988). Kellog also estimates that 34% will come from Asia, 34% from Latin America, 16% from Europe, and 16% from "other".

The average age and the average educational level of immigrants varies greatly from country to country (McCarty & Carrea, 1988). Their ability to compete successfully in America's workforce appears to be a function of both their educational background and their previous work experiences.

The most important concept to understand with respect to our recent immigrants is embodied in what McCarty and Carrea (1988) call the "wave theory". This theory holds that the first wave of immigrants from a given country tend to be the most wealthy and the best educated - and thus the easiest to assimilate into American life. With each succeeding wave, immigrants from a given country tend, on the average, to be less affluent and less well educated. It is easy to understand why some American minority persons tend

to resent the apparent rapid and successful ways in which "first wave" immigrants become part of American society. As succeeding waves of immigrants come to America, they can be expected to increasingly be faced with problems currently being experienced by both poor and minority Americans along with the language and cultural problems they bring with them. The problems seem sure to become even greater in future years.

Concluding Remarks

While studying the documents used as references in this paper, I counted over 200 suggestions for helping women, minority persons, poor persons, and/or immigrants attain greater equity both in America's education system and in its workforce. I see few indicators that such suggestions are being enthusiastically implemented. Perhaps Mark Twain was right when he remarked: "AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE, THERE'S A LOT MORE SAID THAN DONE".

The basic challenges in meeting the needs of the changing workforce in the 1986 - 2000 period and beyond appear to be three in number. They involve solving the following kinds of problems: (1) problems of discrimination; (2) problems of poverty; and (3) problems of educational preparation. Neither the problems of discrimination nor the problems of poverty can be effectively attacked until and unless we first solve the problems of providing appropriate educational opportunities to all persons - youth and adults - in our society. Education must come first. There is no other way.

For this to happen will require a joining together of the many kinds of agencies and organizations referenced in this paper. This is no time to argue about who should be helped first - women, minorities, poor persons, or immigrants. Instead, it is a time to recognize that America's future is dependent on meeting the needs of all persons for equity in access to both educational and occupational opportunities. This is certainly an ideal time in our history to have an "Education President". Let us hope we now have one.

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